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January 2, 1997

PSC SCHEDULES JANUARY 7 HEARING ON GREAT FALLS GAS RATE CASE

The Public Service Commission will hold a hearing in Great Falls Tuesday, January 7, on Great Falls Gas Company's request to increase its rates for natural gas by more than 9 percent.

The technical hearing is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. at the Senior Citizens' Center, 1004 Central Avenue, followed by a public meeting on the rate case to be held at 7 p.m. at the same location.

The pending case is a consolidation of two Great Falls Gas filings before the PSC. One is the company's annual tracker filing to adjust its rates to reflect the cost it pays for natural gas. In this case, the company asked to increase rates by about 3 percent to raise an additional \$385,906 in annual revenue to cover its gas costs. The second is a general rate case filed in July. In that case, Great Falls Gas requested a 6-1/2-percent rate hike in order to increase annual revenues by \$962,773.

Great Falls Gas and the Montana Consumer Counsel, which represents residential and small business customers in matters before the commission, proposed an agreement to settle the case in October. In November the PSC issued an interim order in the consolidated case, temporarily approving a rate increase to allow the company to raise all the increased revenue requested in the gas tracker filing and to raise \$274,435 of the \$962,773 requested in the general rate case. The commission will issue a final order in this case soon after the public hearing.

Other issues in the case include the company's no-interest loan program surcharge and changes to gas transportation rates.

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